

A LETTER TO A PERSON of QUALITY, Occasion'd by the News of the Ensuing PARLIAMENT.

Honoured Sir,

THE next Parliament being that, by which the Hopes or Fears of the Nation are in a great measure to be determined, and your Interest being considerable enough to make you a Member of it, give me leave to send you these Considerations on the present state of Affairs: Let not, I beseech you, your being placed in so high a Post, make you neglect any Information you may receive from a Person, tho' of an inferior Station. He that is near the Sun, does indeed partake of most warmth; but he may have a more advantageous prospect of things, that lies at a convenient distance.

Sir, I doubt not but you will be one of those, who will shortly represent a Nation, whereof by a moderate computation, at least Two Hundred parts are Protestants; and whatever your Concern may be at another time for any particular division of them) 'tis a care of the Religion in general I now inculcate to you. I am sure that, whatever Glosses are put upon things, Whether you will consent that Popery shall come in, is the Truth of the Question; and the present Scene of Affairs is laid in too much Sun, to make us either not see the Design, or not suspect the contrivance.

We know, that pairing of our Nails and Claws, Rooting out the Sanguinary Laws, And humbling the Church of *England*, are the witty Sarcasms of every Pamphlet: But if we consider that there is a Church in the World, that doth both teach and practice such Cruelties, to which the utmost Severities of our Penal Laws are indeed, in comparison, but scratching; we shall find that these Laws are only Defensive weapons; and that they were never enacted without Reason, nor practiced without Provocation: And upon that consideration, it is as unreasonable a request at this time to take them off, as it would be to desire the *Hollanders* to dig down those Banks that stop an Inundation.

Not to give you a view of *Popery* in Speculation; such as, That there is no Faith to be kept with Hereticks; That the Pope may absolve Subjects from their Allegiance to their Natural Prince; That Heretical Print-

ces may be slain by their Subjects, and the like; (tho' these have been too solemnly established, not to be considered) we have overt-acts enough to justify our apprehensions. We cannot chuse but remember a Reign wherein our Religion had very little quarter; the Gunpowder Plot was laid too deep to be so soon forgotten; and some Centuries must pass, before they can wipe off the stains of the *Irish* Massacre: Nay, tho' the belief of these and the like Cruelties, may be objected against, as being built upon the Uncertainty of Traditions; yet we have late and visible instances to refresh our memories: We have every day at our doors living monuments of Inhumanity, that warn us to prevent our own, by their Misfortunes; and that plainly shew to us, that the circumstances of their Sufferings, deserve as well our Care as Compassion.

As for the Penal Laws, I dare say they were designed for the security of the Government; but if the King and Parliament think otherwise, (tho' I confess the debate about them too, may prudentially be referred to another season) I envy no Man the Liberty of his Conscience. But the TESTS (the repealing of which is expected will be the merit of the late Indulgence) will certainly admit of a further consideration: The wisdom of that Parliament that enacted these Laws, thought then they were great Securities to our Religion against Popery; and I cannot perceive any such favourable aspects, that at this time may render them the less necessary. These Laws cannot be pretended to affect any Man's Conscience, unless our Preferments make the scruple; and if so, we shall find this Indulgence to be a very hard bargain, when for the liberty of a Barn, we shall give them possession of our Churches. We must consider that the consequence of this Repeal will be no less; for if Mandats (as be sure they will) be liberally distributed, what Patron can deny to present, or Bishop refuse admission? And indeed we shall leave them but a very indifferent excuse; when they can return no other reason for not complying with the King, but because the person he recommends, is of his own Religion.

If by the present distribution of Offices, both Civil and Military, we had no reason, after this Repeal, to suspect at least a proportionable share in the favour of the Government; the request would be something plausible: But since by comparing of things, we may rationally guess, that the Papists, by this advantage, do not only design to partake of, but engross the Preferments; we must inevitably conclude, That so tame a resignation of our Offices and other Places, into the hands of those, who by fatal experience have shewed us what use they will make of them, will be too generous and dangerous a Complement at this time to be offered.

Nay, 'tis a little too much upbraiding our own Loyalty, to take off these Laws at this juncture; as if the Protestants either would not, or could not discharge all Places of Trust, without the addition of Popish Services. We were able to bring the King to the Throne, and preserve him

him in it without their assistance; and if on the sudden they become so necessary, we must have leave to believe, that there is some extraordinary work to be done, that Protestant hands are too unhallowed for the undertaking.

I should imagine, that before you think of repealing the Tests, the debate would be most natural to enquire whether they are now in being; and to consider whether the Acts of a King solemnly ratified in Parliament, are not a little too venerable to be made bold with and dispensed, by every indigent Officer. Your Liberties and Priviledges will be so closely interwoven with those of your Predecessors, that not to be concerned for the breach of theirs, will be in the event to neglect your own: so that when this Drudgery is over, and you shall be thought useless, if upon other occasions the plain meaning of your Acts should be wrested by the Ignorance or Knavery of the Interpreters; you will have no right hereafter to complain of the Wrong, tho never so fatal, since you yourselves tacitly admit of so partial a President.

Before you admit Papists into Publick Employments, you will surely consider the consequences of it further than His present Majesties services; and tho their Loyalty may be thought Sterling in this Reign, you will no doubt hearken to the reasons that may be given to suspect it in the next. In the Council of *Rome* under *Gregory* the 7th, in the 3d and 4th Councils of *Lateran*, under *Alexander* the 3d, and *Innocent* the 3d, in the Council of *Lyons* under *Innocent* the 4th, and in that of *Constance* under *Martin* the 5th, it was established, That the Pope hath Power to depose Princes, and absolve Subjects from their Oaths of Allegiance; That Heretical Princes, and those that neglect to root out Hereticks, shall be deposed; as was actually practised upon the Emperor *Frederick* the 2d. To name no more, these are such indispensible ties they lie under to destroy us, that we should be unpardonable, if we expose the Royal Person we have in view for the next Succession, to the danger of such astonishing Anathemas.

And these are so far from being groundless suggestions, that we should be raw in our own History, if we cannot produce Copies that have been faithfully transcribed from these fatal Originals: Pope *Pius* the 9th's Bull against *Q. Elizabeth* was too publicly exposed not to be taken notice of: in it he by his Power Apostolical declares the Queen a Heretick; her self and all her adherents to be Excommunicated and Anathematized; he deprives her of all her Dominions, and absolves her Subjects from any Oaths of Allegiance they had sworn to her, and forbids them under the penalty of an Anathema to pay any act of obedience to her. Thus as a Heretick and an Usurper was she left to the rage of the whole Party; and tho they thought cruelty at that time not to be so advisable; yet they were forced to make their want of strength to be an Apology to excuse their good nature. In such a case indeed we find the most favourable of their Casuists, to allow that the zeal and intention of Catholicks to root out Heresie, is sufficient where Hereticks are too prevailing.

To this let us add (as it more nearly affects us) the Bull of *Clement* the 8th. toward the close of that *Queens* Reign, in which it is provided, That when it should happen that *Miserable Woman* (as the Pope's Phrase is) should die, That they should admit none to the Crown, *Quantum cunque propinquitate Sanguinis niterentur, nisi ejusmodi essent qui fidem Catholicam non modo tolerarent, sed omni ope ac studio promoverent, & more Majorum juajurando se id præstituros susciperent, &c.* tho never so nearly allied to it by blood, unless they would not only tolerate the Catholick Religion, but promote by all their force and endeavour, and according to Ancient Custom would by Oath undertake to perform the same. Which Bull had an immediate reference to King *James* the First, and was intended to prevent him in his claim to the Crown, which he was then the next Heir to.

If then men are justly moved by Examples, and that fear is so far from being a weakness, that 'tis commendable when well grounded; we must be inexcusably stupid, if we do not look about us, when we have instances before us that are so fresh and fragrant: we must shamefully overlook all the Transactions of *Europe*, if the danger of Popery at this time makes no impression. By all that we can observe, their hopes of Establishing their Religion seem to be warm and vigorous; and tho their Opportunity be short, their Methods are quick and surprising; despairing to reduce us by the common policy of Time and Persuasion. When they have got the Power into their hands, we must expect to surrender upon discretion; a Heretick no more than a Rebel is allowed the Priviledge of capitulating. Our Laws are like *Samson's* Hair, the cutting of them off will reduce us to a state of weakness; and I am afraid we shall find it too late to lament the loss of our strength, when the *Philistines* are upon us.

Men, if they please, may Harangue upon the Liberty we enjoy; and the Security we are promised; and plausibly insinuate that a Cloud no bigger than a mans hand can never be improved into a Tempest: but for all that, matters of fact and daily observations are evidences too clear to be baffled: we cannot bring our sense and reason to such a resignation, as to believe that Popery has no mind to be uppermost; the Design is too plain to be palliated; and I could reckon up several circumstances to prove it, did it not engage me to reflect upon some things, that are too tender to be mentioned.

The great pains that the Papists take to sollicite Votes for repealing the Tests, is a full conviction to me, that the Protestants have no small interest in them: and therefore we ought no more to be perswaded by them out of our Laws, than a man ought to give up his Weapon to an Adversary, from whom he is to expect no quarter when he is taken. If the Papists had no other aim by this intrigue, but (as they would make us believe) a Liberty to enjoy all Civil Offices in common with other Subjects; their Number in the Kingdom is so inconsiderable, that the advantage they could propose to themselves from this Liberty, would not be worth the labour of procuring it: the Tests lay no task upon them but that easie

one of being quiet, and minding their own business; they are excused from serving the Offices of Sheriffs, and being returned upon Juries: and these have never been looked upon as advantages to be canvassed. Nay, supposing their promise of not interrupting our Religion, to be in earnest, the visible interest we are like to have in the next Reign, would engage them under their present advantage to be obliging: and instead of making us jealous for our Religion by taking off our Laws, would willingly consent to any further securities that could be demanded. So that upon the whole we must conclude, That giving up our Laws is not safe, tho it might be Civil: A generous adversary will scorn to desire any thing that looks like undermining. And therefore if any one would persuade us to dismiss our security and strength, we ought to suspect that he designs to make advantage of our weakness.

The only Objection against the Tests that I ever yet met with, is, That they are unnatural, in depriving Subjects of their natural right of serving their King and Country. But this Objection is so vain and speculative, that surely it would have ne'r been offered, but by those men who in all their other dealings with us, have shewed themselves more apt to impose upon the understanding, than convince it: For what more common in all Governments whatsoever, than certain Conditions required to qualify men for publick Employments? And in our own Nation what are those degrees that capacitate men both for the Bar and Pulpit, but so many Humane Laws that exclude all others from the like advantages?

Indeed a Reverend Person has lately endeavoured to strengthen this Objection by the addition of three more: I shall only briefly repeat them to you, and leave both the Author and his Reasons to the issue of a stricter examination.

The first Reason is, That the Test ought to be abrogated, because of its dishonourable birth and original, it being the first-born of *Oats's* Plot, and brought forth on purpose to give credit and reputation to the Perjury.

Now let us suppose that the Plot was *Oat-stan*, and that the whole of it was a perfect Imposture; yet why must the Test suffer for those miscarriages? The worst times generally give birth to the best Laws; and if this Law be at this time thought reasonable, (I may say necessary) what need we enquire into the occasion of its making? A Law may be continued for better, and perhaps, juster reasons, than those for which it was first Enacted. Indeed 'tis ill manners to fall foul upon any thing for the faults of its production; the reflection would come home to him: for even some men have been so unhappy in their extraction, that they would deserve but little esteem, if the blemishes of their Birth were always to be remembered.

His second Reason, why the Test ought to be abrogated, is, Because of the incompetent Authority by which the Law was Enacted; it is a Law of an Ecclesiastical nature, made without the Authority of the Church,

Church, contrary to the practice of the Christian world in all ages, &c.

Tho by this Argument against the Test, this Reverend Author might have imposed upon us as to the practice of other Countries in Laws of the like nature: yet if he thought to delude us in the Customs of our own Nation, he ought at least to have timed his Reasons so well, as not to have published them in the same *Gazette*, wherein there is an eminent instance against him. We read there an Order made by nine men, whereof six are Laymen (surely a much inferior Authority to that by which the Test was Enacted) whereby seven and twenty men of as Liberal Education as any of their Successors, are made incapable of being admitted into any Ecclesiastical Promotion, or receiving Holy Orders: if any thing be of an Ecclesiastical nature, surely receiving Holy Orders is: I am sure it has been longer in the Church than *Transubstantiation*. In short, this Argument through the whole course of it, is a little too severe upon the Honourable Persons that made the Order: and whatever other men might think of their proceedings, it was unpardonable in him to reflect upon a Court, by whose authority he now enjoys the best part of his sustenance: so that he must either forsake his Argument, or leave his Place: and when he is left to such an easie choice, 'tis no hard matter to guess which will be first relinquished.

The last Reason he brings against the Test is, Because of the uncertainty and falshood of the matters contained in the Declaration it self: as first, That there is no *Transubstantiation* in the Sacrament of our Saviours Body and Blood: And 2^{ly}, That the Invocation of Saints, and the Mother of God, is Idolatry.

In his handling of these points, which makes up a formal Treatise for *Transubstantiation* (tho he calls it Reasons for abrogating the Test) he has indeed laboriously proved that he himself ought not to have taken the Tests, but not why others of a different opinion should not. I must confess this Reason above all the rest, seems to be the most designing: and tho it be here brought only against the Test, it is really levelled against our Religion: for the same Argument which proves, That because of the uncertainty of *Transubstantiation*, the denial of it ought not to be made a Test, will as directly conclude that it ought not to be made an Article: so that whenever this Author and his Friends have thought they have proved the uncertainty and falshood of any of our established Doctrines, by parity of reason they will expect we should consent that they may be abolished.

But since his Argument against the Test, depends upon the falshood, as he thinks, of the matters contained in it; Our Nobility and Gentry are for that very reason obliged to continue it: they must not be now for repealing the Test, lest the world should believe they are likewise for *Transubstantiation*: and that this Argument of all others cannot prevail upon them, since at the same time they are made Repealers, they must be made Papists. And therefore I hope our Protestant Nobility and Gentry will

will not hearken to such weak Reasonings: but think themselves bound to take care of their Religion: tho this Author by the Specimen he has given of his Faith, does not appear to lie under the same Obligations.

If then, Sir, you should consent to repeal the Tests, I beseech you to consider what persons you would oblige by so fatal a condescension: As for the Dissenters, I hope by this time they are generally convinced that our Dangers are equal, and that therefore we ought to join for our common security. *Protestants* of all sorts are included in the same sentence denounced against *Hereticks*: and if at this time there are some Acts of kindness extended to some divisions of them, they must look upon it no more than reprieving of one Malefactor for the execution of another.

The Dissenters have been always apprehensive of Popery, even when it lay at further distance: and surely they cannot now be so unreasonably courageous as to fear no danger when the Leprosie does not only stick to our walls, but is come into our very houses: they ought not to dwell so much upon their present Ease, as to neglect all future Securities, and to be so prodigal of their felicity during this Politick Cessation, as not carefully to distinguish betwixt a short Truce, and a perpetual Alliance.

If they think that their endeavours in repealing the Tests, will secure them a lasting interest in the Papists; it will require no great foresight in Affairs to tell them that they will be mistaken: for if it were in the nature of Popery to return kindnesses; the Church of *England-men* have laid in a stock that seemed to be inexhaustible: but we see, that as soon as they began to put a stop to Popery, their vigorous opposing the Bill of Exclusion, and the Rebellion in the *West* were soon forgotten; as if their Services and other mens Faults had been put in the same Act of Oblivion.

But for once we will suppose that Popery is not ungrateful; and that whatsoever becomes of the Church of *England*, their Promises to the Dissenters shall be unalterable: yet this will not justify the Dissenters for engaging in any concern that may advance the Popish Interest: for all Protestants abroad (who cast a diligent eye upon our present Circumstances) must take offence at so unseasonable an Alliance; and they who have so severely felt such contrary effects of Popish Power, will have no reason to think well of those, who will now contribute to advance it. So that the Dissenters cannot join with the Papists without Scandal, tho they might do it with Security; it would make all indifferent men fall in the opinion they had conceived of their Wisdom and Integrity; and by so unskilful a management of their present Ease, they would lose all the pity and compassion, which their former Sufferings had extorted.

'Tis indeed observed, that His Majesty's late Declaration has raised in some of the Dissenters, an unusual affection for the Contrivers of it: but to the most thinking men of all sides, the publishing of this Instrument was so far from being a surprize, that they wondred they had not seen it sooner; for Toleration is so far from being any new contrivance to undermine our Religion, that 'tis a juggle that has been long ago detected. And therefore 'twere worth while for the most serious of the Dissenters, to advise the rest,

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not to be carried too far by these sudden heats; and not to enter into Covenants upon the merit of such a slender engagement, before they have truly examined the Conditions of it on their side, and have taken time to consider, whether the kindneses expressed in it are real, or only acted. Not to take an estimate of what they are to expect from this Indulgence, by the performance of that short Paragraph in it, that relates to the Church of England; I would have them consider that this so much celebrated Liberty is only in matters of mere Religion: by this Politick Reserve this Liberty is not so extensive as some may imagine; for upon the first false step the Dissenters make in opposition to Popery, how easie will it be to reduce them to the state of suffering? 'Tis but tacking some pretended matters of State to their most innocent Assemblies; and then if for their defence, they represent their case never so merely Religious, their Adversaries, who will be sure to oppose their Plea, will take care that it shall not be received under so advantageous an abstraction.

And therefore the Dissenters cannot stand so much in their own light, as not to see from what Side they are to expect the most lasting security. Protestants of all sorts are now happily brought to a better understanding of one another; they may easily prevent all future disputes, since they plainly see from whence their division cometh. In short, all things tend to a most amicable Accommodation; unless some men be brought over by the plausible pretence of a little present ease, to involve themselves and others in a reversion of Sufferings.

It may not be amiss, to consider what persons are now retained Advocates for repealing our Laws; and to examine a little the complexion of the men, before we are prevailed upon by their Arguments. The Papers that daily come about, are drawn up either by known Papists, or else by such men, who have given all the reason in the world to suspect that their Labours are mercenary. They who were not long since the great Sticklers for Property, are now become the Darlings of Prerogative: the *Pacquet of Advice from Rome* is now improved into a Closer Correspondence: to serve the present turn, they shamefully contradict all they formerly had written; and call themselves Rogues perhaps for the only actions of their lives, that men had reason to believe them Honest.

To conclude, Our Laws are the only human support we have for our selves, our Liberties, and our Religion; and as long as our title to these is continued, whatever our present state may be, we need not doubt of a favourable reversion. Nevertheless, our care for our Religion, shall not make us forget our duty to our King; and if at any time we cannot obey his Commands, we shall, I hope, convince the world, that it is not our Fault, but our Misfortune: for we have not yet learned implicit obedience either in Church or State; as the Scriptures are our Rule in the one, so are our Laws our directions in the other; and as long as we firmly keep to these measures of our obedience to God and the King, we shall not be afraid to lose the Character of good Christians, or good Subjects. I am,

Honoured Sir, Your most humble and much obliged Servant, R. S.